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ABSTRACT

The use of traditional stories in American Indian language programs connects students' reading to their lives and familiarizes learners with the rhythms of the oral language. Puppet performances are one way of connecting reading programs to the Native oral tradition. A high school reading lesson in a first-year Hupa language class uses many reading strategies in six stages. In the initial stage of setting the scene for the puppet play, the teacher may describe the sequence of learning and what to expect in each stage of the lesson. The use of flashcards, note cards, audiotapes, and other aids catches students' attention. In the second stage, comprehensible input, the teacher asks easy questions; students demonstrate comprehension but do not have to respond verbally. If they do respond verbally, they need only respond with "yes" or "no." In the guided practice stage, students respond with yes or nor by repeating what the teacher has said or by answering either-or questions. In the independent practice stage, students supply the vocabulary term in answering the teacher's questions. Students may formulate words, phrases, and sentences. In the challenge stage, students initiate activities by reading traditional stories, performing plays adapted from the stories, or by playing games designed from vocabulary in the lesson. Hupa elders are the source of the lesson material, and they help teach the class. The final stage is optional and involves attending a class taught in the Hoopa community by elders, where there is opportunity for spontaneous language use. (Contains 12 references.) (TD)

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ED 462 242

# Teaching Reading with Puppets

Ruth Bennett

In Canada and the United States today approximately 210 indigenous languages are still spoken out of the over 300 spoken before the arrival of Columbus (Krauss, 1998). However, all is not well with these remaining indigenous languages. For a language to stay alive, somebody has to be learning it. Recent research indicates that only 35 of the remaining languages in the United States and Canada are spoken by young people (Krauss, 1998).

Will these remaining languages survive? Today, children are no longer being punished routinely for speaking their language in schools. Many schools with indigenous populations, particularly on Indian Reserves and Reservations, have indigenous language programs. But having a program does not guarantee that children are learning their languages. Factors external to a language program can play a considerable role. One researcher has stated that today English language movies, television, and videotapes are doing what a century of washing mouths out with soap in boarding schools could not accomplish (Reyhner, 2000). In addition to distractions from media, the family's attitude is a factor. For many decades, it was a rare family that was in a position to do anything to retain traditional language or culture. The explanation for this is related to a need for sheer survival or to a belief that, given the long history of decline, nothing can be done stop the inevitable.

The fact is that the use of most indigenous languages in the United States has eroded and needs restoration. Effective instruction is needed in language programs to deal with a variety of issues. In this paper I offer an effective teaching method and illustrate it with a reading lesson based on native oral traditions. I take into account a range of recent research on children's language and literacy learning.

Many tribal language programs have found that the *story*, that is, the oral tradition of the tribe, connects children's reading to their lives. These tribes have a variety of ways of including content from the culture of the tribal community in their reading instruction (McCarty & Watahomigie, 1998). In California, at a recent Advocates for California Language Survival conference, led by Leanne Hinton and Nancy Steele, presentations on tribal reading programs by California tribes connected reading programs to their Native oral tradition using a variety of activities, including storybooks, accompanying videos, live dramas, puppet plays, and games (Language is Life, 4th Annual Conference, March 17-19, 2000). Although puppet making is not traditional for California tribes, puppets go hand-in-hand with traditional stories. Puppet performances harness group energy for the reading task by requiring a team of performers, a narrator, and readers. Puppet plays facilitate children's literacy development because reading traditional stories can get learners close to the rhythms of their oral language. To insure this eventuality, I retained the original spoken Hupa language in writing the puppet show for the lesson described in this paper. I changed Hupa forms in the text only when necessary for coherence.

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**An Approach to Language and Literacy Teaching for Native Children**

Below is an example of a teaching approach centering on a puppet play based on a script from a Hupa traditional story. It is understood in tribal language programs that language and culture are linked. Those tribes who develop reading programs from a cultural perspective understand that culture is an important aspect of an indigenous students' identity and that students will become better readers when they can identify with the stories they are reading.

The Language Proficiency Method described here puts many reading strategies together. In addition to a question-answer approach and the sequencing from easy to difficult questions, this method emphasizes communication-based reading strategies, such as oral reading, group reading out loud, taking turns reading, and reading within peer groups. The six stages in the teaching sequence are listed below. At each stage, there is teacher-initiated language use, teacher questions and student responses, or student initiated language use.

1. Setting the scene. Initial introductions vary. The teacher may describe the sequence of learning and what to expect in each stage of the lesson. The teacher uses flashcards, note cards, audiotapes, and other aids to catch students' attention.
2. Comprehensible input. The teacher asks easy questions where students demonstrate comprehension but do not have to respond verbally. If they do respond verbally, they need only respond with "yes" or "no."
3. Guided practice. Students respond with yes or no by repeating what the teacher has said or by answering either-or questions.
4. Independent practice. Students supply the vocabulary term in answering the teacher's questions. Students may formulate words, phrases, and sentences.
5. Challenge. Here, students initiate activities. They read stories from their oral tradition, perform plays adapted from the stories, or they play games designed from vocabulary in the lesson.
6. Expansion. Extra-curricular activities.

**A Field Study**

The following description of a lesson using the Language Proficiency Method is from a high school reading lesson in Danny Ammon's first year Hupa language class on January 20, 2000. Having a well-planned lesson is essential. A major benefit of planning is that it empowers students. Planning the lesson and sharing the plan with students gives them the opportunity to talk about their "goals, plans, and available actions" (Paris, Lipson & Wixson, 1994, p. 791) while developing reading skills. Active participation helps in developing reading skills. Objectives in the lesson are to develop Hupa language proficiency by: a) developing oral reading skills, b) increasing vocabulary knowledge, c) improving grammar functions, and d) expanding story performance competencies.

The reading material for the lesson is the Misq'it Kin xotile story, a story about a young gambler from Misq'it, a village in the Hoopa Valley. Group oral

reading is the primary way of presenting this lesson. Group reading out loud requires each student to read in front of the entire class, which offers the advantage of establishing group cohesion. It requires individual students to command the attention of the entire group. Group reading is accompanied with student-initiated questions about the reading. When students initiate questions, they are already thinking about what they will be reading.

There is some current research that documents the contributions of indigenous Elders to reading programs. The article, "Nothing like a good read," is a discussion of *Success for All*, a reading program developed at Johns Hopkins University that incorporates Elders as volunteer listeners for oral reading classes (Arthurs, 2000). This article reports that, after three years, the percentage of students needing tutoring has decreased from 50% to below 30%. In addition, there has been a 10% increase in standardized reading test scores and a higher percentage of students moving on to the next grade at the end of the year. Finally, the presence of Hupa-speaking Elders is credited with putting an emphasis on proficiency and "giving the students language skills that are necessary in other subjects."

In another recent study conducted in a Navajo language program in the community school at Rough Rock, Arizona, McCarthy and Watahomogie discuss "new developments" in the program, including having "high school students engage in applied research to develop Navajo and English literacy" (1999, p. 356). In this program, the applied research consists of students working with Elders to learn drama, storytelling, and Native performing arts.

Hupa elders were the source of the reading material for this lesson, and they helped teach the class. I first heard the Misq'it Kin xotile story from Hupa language elders Fred Davis, Herman Sherman, and Ruel Leach on May 2, 1984. The story describes Hupa culture as it has been passed down through generations of Hupa speakers. It dramatizes beliefs related to winning when gambling with Indian cards and to reversing bad luck. In creating the written text, I first wrote a word-for-word transcript from an audiotape I had made. I then wrote a puppet play script from the transcript. Hupa elders James Jackson and Calvin Carpenter helped with teaching the puppet play lesson. They testified that the story is an old Hupa story and affirmed that the Hupa language in the story is correct. They talked about the importance of preserving Hupa culture, and they discussed how learning the Hupa language is essential in preserving the culture. The lesson sequence is as follows:

1. Setting the Scene. Student participation in this lesson began when I introduced the lesson to them. I explained that in the one and a half hour session, I divided the lesson into stages:

1. Setting the Scene: Introductions and plan for the lesson.
2. Comprehensible Input: Silent reading.
3. Guided Practice: Student questions.
4. Independent Practice: Students taking turns reading the story on note cards.

5. Challenge: a) Students reading the puppet show at their seats with each character reading his or her lines and the free English that follows. b) Students performing the puppet show in the puppet theatre continuing the same reading procedure with Hupa and English.
6. Expansion: Outside reading experiences: an optional stage in the method.

I explained to the students that the lesson is designed in stages to ensure that instruction proceeds in a sequenced fashion from simple to more difficult and that students build their proficiency at one stage before tackling the next one. I previewed student participation at each stage. I told them there would be opportunities for everyone to participate. In the oral reading stage, every one would read their part. All of the students would be asked to read the Hupa language as well as the English. I told them that if they could not read the Hupa language, they could substitute English. I told them it was important in the oral reading to keep the story going.

2. Comprehensible Input: Incorporating Silent Reading. The need for silent reading becomes apparent if students are asked to read out loud and are hesitant. I characterized the collective mood of this particular class as tentative. So I offered them silent reading time. Silent reading provides the opportunity for students to get involved with the text and to figure out what they do not know before their proficiency is tested. Silent reading gives them time to formulate questions. I handed out 30 cards containing the story segmented into 30 units. Each card contained Hupa language, literal translation, and free translation. Because the hesitancy remained at the end of the silent reading period, I repeated the instructions that each student take some time to read what was on their card, and I began to walk from one student to the next asking if they had any questions or if they wanted to know how to pronounce any of the words, as in the examples below:

Student: (reads a card) Minɬung ɬo:q' yiditile (ten otters)
Teacher: Hayde minɬung? (Are there ten?) (points at the word minɬung)
Student: (nods yes)

Student: (reads from a card) K'iye kin nawhle:te. (I am going to gamble again.)
Teacher: K'iye 'ung? (Again?) (points at the word k'iye)
Student: (nods yes)

3. Guided Practice: Student-Initiated Questions. In fact, the students did have questions. Questions have been shown to be highly effective in stimulating reading comprehension. Ruddell and Ruddell, in a study of 24 teachers and 522 K-3 students (1994) showed statistically significant reading and listening comprehension achievement gains for 2nd and 3rd graders who had teachers who asked questions and encouraged student questions over teachers who did not. Some students asked what they were supposed to read on their note cards. I explained reasons for my answers. I formulated questions based on the material contained

on the note cards to give students practice prior to the group reading. For example,

Student: (reads from note card) Tehtɬ'iwhne:s Toɬq'ats'ding ch'isday. (The water monster lived at Supply Creek.)
Teacher: Tehtɬ'iwhne:s Toɬq'ats'ding ch'isday 'ung? (Did the water monster live at Supply Creek?) (Teacher points at the words on the card.)
Student: Diye.

At this stage, the teacher tests student comprehension by posing yes-no questions based upon what the students have read. They can indicate comprehension and then read what is written on her card. Teacher questions are a way of monitoring comprehension of what students will be reading as a group.

4. Independent Practice: Group Oral Reading. A significant body of reading research has dealt with the importance of guessing. Guessing has been identified as one of the three primary ways to develop reading skills, the other two ways being analogizing and patterning (Ehri, 1994). Research has found that students making guesses are correct more often than they are wrong. In Goodman's miscue analysis, primary school readers during oral reading of texts made guesses that were "semantically and syntactically consistent with the text read up to that point," indicating that guesses were based on expectations (Goodman, 1965, pp. 639-643).

The independent practice stage of the lesson required students to read the sentences on their cards. Oral reading forces a student to put their reading skills on the line, so I introduced this by letting students know they had choices. I used questions like, "Who wants to Y?" and "Do you want to Y?" to allow students the choice of refusing. This dynamic works with classes where there is a degree of positive energy from the start. The Hupa language class at the high school is an elective, so it is one that students have chosen. A choice by one student helped to establish and maintain a positive momentum. He said, "I like to gamble," as a way of indicating that he wanted to read a story about a young gambler.

I told them it is important to continue on, even when they stumble, and to shift to English or to guess, rather than stop reading. The students were required to read the Hupa language and then to translate or read the English. Guessing involved pronunciation as well as making accurate free translations. Here are some examples of students reading in Hupa and then translating into English:

Student: Me'dilme' xodiɬt'e:n, we're bringing him back in a boat.
Student: Ɬeno:ldingmiɬ no:ch'ing'yehdiɬqe:t, we're paddling past Weitchpec.

I found that when students didn't use the Hupa language they read the English translation so that the reading would continue. An illustration follows:

Student: Long water snake, (did not say) tehtɬ'iwhne:s.
Student: He was still breathing yet. (did not say) Xa:t na'tiɬye:wh.

In these cases, students whose job was to read the Hupa language may have shifted to English due to their sense of audience. Their intention may have been to communicate the meaning of what was going on to those who would not immediately understand the Hupa language.

In the Hupa high school class, two Hupa Elders, James Jackson and Calvin Carpenter, volunteered their help with the class and to listen to the group reading. Their presence validated the Hupa language being read; they were listening carefully to what the students were reading. Having Hupa Elders present is invaluable in emphasizing indigenous culture in Hupa language classes because our Elders are the embodiment of the culture.

The presence of the Elders helps to validate the story. In answering student questions, I was able to refer questions to Elders to make the argument that the story is a true story. When a student asked, "Why do the sea lions go upriver to ~~t~~e:lding?" I told him that the mouth of the South Fork of the Trinity River is where sea lions used to go to have their little ones in the old days and that there were, in fact, sea lions in the river. I asked one of the Elders if that was so, and he said, "That's right. We used to have sea lions here."

When another student asked, "Why did the two boys happen to be there at the mouth of the Klamath?" I was able to answer: "Cleaning sweathouses used to be a job young boys did, and sweathouses used to be close to the river." Again, I asked for verification from an Elder, and again I received an affirmative response: "Men and boys used to just about live in the sweat houses. They had pillows in there and pokers for the fire—everything they needed."

5. Challenge: Group performing with puppets—Choices. Introducing this stage, I told that students about the benefits of puppet show performances. Through such performances, students can explore stories in cooperation with their peers and also improve their individual proficiencies. An individual student will exert the effort to sound out a word if the others in the class are listening to what she is saying. Individual students may be willing to work harder if there is a group goal. If a student knows that performance is the end goal, then she knows the purpose for practice. One teacher I know had worked with the class practising lines for several days prior to my appearance. This involved many repetitions of words and phrases until students felt comfortable repeating them. The work he had done with the class during the semester showed in the students' abilities to read the Hupa language and by their good behaviour. The underlying principle is that the individual stays on task in a team effort.

Research has shown the importance of student choices. Student choices in a language class, "established a common understanding of possibilities, yet permitted individual selection of what was accepted," according to a study of a high school English class in Santa Barbara (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1994). Students in this study had the opportunity to make choices. It was found that this was essential for them not only in developing common views, but also in forming individual views.

In Stage 5, students chose their roles in the story by selecting puppets that represented the characters they would portray. There was a puppet for each char-

acter. In the Misq'it Kin xotile story, the characters are as follows: Gambler from Misq'it (grown up), Young Gambler from Misq'it (younger man), Old Man who makes medicine, Big Sea Lion, Long Water Snake, Black Otters, White Otter, Two Boys, Fisherman, Old Woman, Old Woman's Daughter.

I brought out the puppets and laid them side by side on a table. When the students saw the puppets, their moods varied. They became expansive or withdrawn, depending on whether they wanted to take this next step into a performance or not. I told the students that we would choose who would take each puppet and asked if there was anyone who wanted to play the lead, either Q'unch'iwilchwil Misq'it Kin xotile, the younger gambler, or his grown up character. I held up both puppets as I gave them their Hupa names and one student said, "I like gambling. I will be the gambler". He took the grown up Misq'it Kin xotile and I scanned the class for interested looks. I asked another young man if he would like to play Q'unch'iwilchwil Misq'it Kin xotile and he indicated agreement by coming up and taking the puppet. Then, because I wanted to involve the young women in the class immediately, I asked if any of them wanted to be either Do:k'iwile, the old woman, or Whiya:ch'e, the daughter. Two volunteers took these puppets, and I held up K'iwingxoya:n, looking for a volunteer, and so on until all the puppets were assigned.

Then I told the students that we would be reading and performing. I told them that, in the first phase, students would read the puppet show at their seats with each character reading his/her lines and the free English that follows, and then, in the second phase, students would perform the puppet show in the puppet theatre continuing the same reading procedure with Hupa and English. At this point, I got out an entire script so that a student who had not chosen a character could be the master reader, coordinating the students lines in case they became confused.

The reading and puppet performance went well. When the students were finished, there was a feeling of accomplishment. In a study of language and literacy development, McGee and Richgels emphasize the importance of group reading experiences and of "playful activities in which children tell stories, act out stories," and use reading and writing (1996, p. 216). McGee and Richgels analyze the success of these activities on the basis that "children tell their stories, other children are the audience, and they are free to make comments or ask questions" (p. 242).

A second value of a puppet show performance is the way in which it incorporates spontaneity into group reading. Even though the students have a script, they either recite the Hupa words or they present an English translation. Sometimes, they will use words that occur to them. For example, Misq'it Kin xotile interjected a line, saying: "na:ne:lay" (I won). The script did not have a line for him at this point. It called for K'iwingxoya:n, the old man, to say: "aht'ingq'a'unt'e na'usdilay" (he won everything). When another student objected that he was not supposed to say "na:ne:lay," he responded, "Why not? I did win." Because his argument was valid and his line fit into the plot, his spontaneous line was accepted.

Vivian Paley has described the value of spontaneous interaction in storytelling activities. In one compelling narrative about her years as a teacher, he relates how she combined storytelling and play in an activity where she played a role and where she accepted revisions to stories as they occurred because of the value of spontaneity: "In storytelling, as in play, the social interactions we call interruptions usually improve the narrative" (Paley, 1990, p. 242).

6. Expansion: The Hoopa Community Class. This stage is optional and generally occurs in activities outside of the classroom. In the Hoopa community, there is a weekly all-community class available to high school students. The Elders present in the classroom were teachers in this community class, so I took the opportunity to invite the high school students to the community class for further work with the elders. I explained that this class meets once a week in the evenings with Elders present to answer questions and to spontaneously generate language.

The importance of the community class is to provide support for the language classes in the public schools and colleges, as well as to encourage community people. The class proceeds with a conversational approach, and I work in grammar teaching in relation to conversation that students are learning. Motivational incentives for attending the class include its easy going atmosphere and having food. Students are not graded in the class, so they are released from the stress of being on task all of the time. Eating together in the community class provides another opportunity for spontaneous language use. The community class offers the chance to demonstrate proficiency in a community setting.

**Conclusion**

I suggest that reading instruction is an essential component in the curriculum, and further, that the oral tradition of the indigenous culture can enhance rather than inhibit reading programs. In this paper, I discussed the use of the Language Proficiency Method with high school students. My experiences with this method in the Hupa language program has implications for other indigenous language programs relative to three areas of development:

1. The development of academic discourse proficiencies: The narrative is an "early form" in terms of its acquisition by young children, and its usefulness continues throughout every level of education for indigenous language students because narrative is the basic form of education in indigenous language communities.
2. The development of second language proficiency: Reading is an important medium for indigenous language revitalization purposes for developing language proficiency in those students who don't speak the indigenous language (Heredia & Francis, 1997).
3. Cognitive development: Narrative performance incorporates a pragmatic approach that uses a traditional vehicle from the indigenous culture in teaching an important aspect of academic proficiency.

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